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ART. I. — *Memoirs of William Beckford of Fonthill, Author of "Vathek."* In two volumes. London: Charles J. Skeet. 1859. Small 8vo. pp. 352, 402.

CELEBRATED men, it is said, are seldom happy in their biographers, and in this regard the author of "Vathek" has been singularly unfortunate. During his long life he drew, not less from his genius than from his wealth and his eccentricities, a very large share of public attention. Yet in more than sixty years of his prominence before the world, and in the fifteen years which have elapsed since his death, until the issue of these anonymous volumes, curiosity regarding him could be gratified only by a few brief sketches. The author of this memoir has perhaps done all he could for his hero. He has produced in some respects a readable work, but the greater part of it is silly, mawkish trash. We have been baffled in our hope to penetrate the mind of Beckford. Thackeray says, in commencing his lecture on George IV., that at first he anticipated no keener delight than to hunt down such an animal; but on close pursuit the man disappeared, and he could lay hold on nothing but a wig, a quizzing-glass, a frogged and starred coat, and an eternal silly simper. Placing Mr. Beckford infinitely above the royal brute, we find, on reviewing his eighty-four years of luxurious life, "Vathek" and some Italian and Portuguese travels;

the rest being made up of enormous towers, velvet hangings, illuminated missals, porcelain, and *virtu*.

The Beckford family was one of antiquity, the name occurring in early English annals, and a Sir William Beckford having been killed at Bosworth Field; but there are no traces of the family, from the knight who fought for Richard III. (if indeed he belonged to the same line), until 1702. Peter Beckford in 1702 is noticed as Lieutenant-Governor of Jamaica, and was the great-grandfather of the builder of Fonthill. He died suddenly in a fit of passion in 1710, leaving two sons, the elder of whom, Peter, became Speaker of the House of Assembly for the island. He died in 1735, leaving thirteen children, the second of whom was William, the celebrated Lord Mayor of London in 1762 and 1770. The second Peter was a very rich planter, the Beckford family having had large possessions in the island from the period of its occupation by England, and he owned no less than twenty-four plantations and twelve hundred slaves. His son William, of much political note, was sent from Jamaica to England at the age of fourteen, and at once put to Westminster School. According to the Memoirs under review, he greatly distinguished himself in his studies, winning the approbation of the chief master; but other authorities represent him always as a coarse, ill-bred man, using bad English and worse Latin. He greatly increased his large fortune by commercial pursuits in London, sitting in Parliament as member for that corporation, and being successively Alderman, Sheriff, and Lord Mayor. It was on the occasion of John Wilkes's liberation from prison in 1770, when addresses were moved and presented to the king, that Beckford acted a part which has insured him celebrity. It is a privilege of the city of London, shared by no other municipal corporation in Great Britain, to present addresses to be received by the sovereign in person; and in accordance with this privilege, an address praying for the dissolution of Parliament, and censuring the House of Commons for expelling Wilkes, was presented. A second address, more energetic and bolder in tone, complaining of "secret and malign influence," — words which had reference to Lord Bute, — followed, to which the

king made an angry reply. The House of Commons then condemned the course of the city by a large vote. This only provoked another remonstrance in vehement language, by some authorities attributed to Lord Chatham, reiterating the former complaints and commenting on the royal reply. When this was presented in state at St. James's by the Lord Mayor Beckford and his attendant suite, the king read the answer prepared for him by his ministers, which in curt and cutting terms expressed his displeasure at the style of the addresses. The business of the deputation was then ended according to etiquette; but Beckford, breaking through courtly rule, asked permission to say a few words, and before the monarch and his courtiers had recovered from their surprise at this bold demand, he made his proposed speech, saying in conclusion: "Permit me, Sire, to observe, that whoever has already dared, or shall hereafter endeavor, by false insinuations and suggestions to alienate your Majesty's affections from your loyal subjects in general, and from the city of London in particular, is an enemy to your Majesty's person and family, a violator of the public peace, and a betrayer of our happy constitution, as it was established at the glorious Revolution." The king listened to this speech in indignant and haughty silence, while Beckford, satisfied with the part he had performed, withdrew. Of late years it has been the fashion to deny that he ever made such a speech, just as it is in vogue with "laborious dulness" to impugn well-earned literary honors; but it is certain, if Beckford's words were not exactly those reported, that he did break through the rule of court, and declare his sentiments firmly, but respectfully; and for such a patriotic act he will long be held in regard by the British people. He died about a month after this event, his decease having probably been hastened by anxiety of mind on political affairs. His statue was set up in Guildhall, with part of his memorable speech inscribed on its pedestal.

William Beckford, Junior, the only legitimate son of the Lord Mayor Beckford, was born at Fonthill Giffard, Wiltshire, September 29, 1759. His father's death took place in his twelfth year, and he was left to the care of his mother.

The great bulk of the elder Beckford's colossal fortune devolved on him, his illegitimate brothers receiving legacies of £5,000 each. His education was strictly attended to at an early age, Lord Lyttleton, who had been his father's friend, selecting a tutor for him. His mother was Maria Hamilton, of the Abercorn branch of that proud family, so that all of young Beckford's connections and associations were, from the first, of aristocratic rank. His fastidious and exclusive spirit found food in the study of heraldry, and he was ever fond of tracing his ancestry, with little reason, to John of Gaunt, while his friends hoped to see him finally abandon these idle pursuits for practical duties, and shine in political life after the example of his father. Lord Chatham had been another strong friend of the elder Beckford, and the sons of these two men, both also destined to celebrity in their way, saw each other frequently in youth, but the intimacy does not appear to have been kept up in after life.

Beckford's education was conducted entirely by tutors. His biographical worshipper informs us that he rode half an hour on horseback at seven in the morning, came back and studied Greek and Latin grammar, read a chapter in the Bible, and then breakfasted. Afterward he went through his routine of classical, French, and English literature, with geography and mathematics. At one he rode for an hour and a half, returned and dressed for dinner, which was then served at three o'clock. He next studied another hour and a half, and for the rest of the day, until eleven, amused himself with light reading, walking, conversation, or music. Whatever he turned his mind to, he learnt thoroughly and rapidly; he had marvellous powers of application, and extraordinary memory; he was gifted with a fine sense of art, a keen eye, an exquisite ear for music, and great facility in acquiring languages. He became well acquainted with Greek, Latin, French, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, Persian, and Arabic,—speaking several of these tongues with perfect fluency. Of nature too, picturesque and animate, he had the most passionate admiration; and as an amateur his pencil drawings were above mediocrity. A man of such splendid and varied accomplishments, with fortune to gratify every desire, should have been a benefactor of man-

kind, and not have squandered his vast treasures on whims, and for the greater part of life burrowed in selfish seclusion.

Lord Chatham, taking a strong interest in him, visited occasionally at his mother's house, and also received him at his own seat in Somersetshire. Here he endeavored to turn young Beckford's attention from the pursuit of Oriental literature, to which he seemed prone, that he might fit himself, by other studies, for public life. He encouraged his declamation, which was forcible, and told his own son, afterward so renowned an orator, that he should be glad to see him as brilliant a speaker as Beckford. For a while the youth seemed to give heed to advice, and abandoned his Eastern dreams, and the reading of the Arabian Nights in particular; but it is not probable that at any time he had the slightest inclination for political life. Under private tutorship he passed five years between town and country, and when he was seventeen years of age his mother, having a strong prejudice against the English universities, determined, after consulting her friends, to send him to Geneva to finish his education. Before this time he had composed his first work, entitled "Biographical Memoirs of Extraordinary Painters," published in London in 1780. It was a satire on the lives of Flemish painters, and, with remarkable knowledge of art, was pointed by piquant description, and keen and scathing wit. In the author's own words, it contained accounts of "Aldrovandus Magnus, with his disciples Andrew Guelph and Og of Basan, Sucrewasser of Vienna, Blunderbussiana of Dalmatia, and Watersouchy of Holland." The work has been highly extolled by critics for its charm of style and delicate humor; but at the present day, when Flemish art is rated more nearly at its worth than in the youth of Beckford, it will scarce repay the trouble of perusal. Beckford has himself told how the plan of it came into his mind. At Fonthill there was a very fine collection of paintings, many of them by Dutch masters, and it was his delight to hear the housekeeper describe them as she went her rounds with strangers. The work she doubtless made of it can be readily appreciated by any one who has ever heard a beef-eater at the Tower of London dilate, among others, on one particular suit of *Sassenger* (Saracen) armor, which was there some

years since, and probably is now. Beckford mischievously determined that the cicerone should have a printed guide-book, and he used afterward, with great glee, to follow the train of gaping rustics, struck dumb with wonder at the recital of the deeds of Og of Basan and Watersouchy.

At Geneva he remained upwards of a year and a half, not only pursuing his studies to advantage, but also enjoying the charm of the refined society for which that city has been historically celebrated. The exquisite climate and scenery of this region, and the freedom from worldly annoyances obtained there, have long made it the chosen retreat of literary men; and as such it proudly claims the most illustrious authors for its lovers:—

“Rousseau, Voltaire, our Gibbon, and De Stael,—
Leman! these names are worthy of thy shore,
Thy shore of names like these! wert thou no more,
Their memory thy resemblance would recall:
To them thy banks were lovely as to all,
But they have made them lovelier.”

As the fame of Beckford's father had preceded him, he received much polite attention from the magistracy and gentry of Geneva, and he was fortunate in making the acquaintance of several illustrious men. Two famous naturalists were resident there, one being Bonnet, so widely known in the scientific world by his correspondence with Reaumur, his researches into animal life, and his philosophical speculations regarding the progressive development of mind from age to age, and the connecting links between the lowest forms of vegetative and animal existence and the highest types of man, and even the Deity. The other was Saussure, one of the most original and successful of naturalists, who made an ascent of Mont Blanc, and whose work on the Swiss Glaciers is a standard authority. The Hubers also, father and son, friends of Voltaire, deserve mention,—the former having left lively sketches of the great Frenchman, while he was himself skilled in music, and was celebrated for the art of cutting profiles in paper of such excellence, that they are now eagerly cherished by virtuosos. His son, who became blind at an early age, was nevertheless an accurate naturalist, aided in his studies by a

devoted wife, and has left several works, the best known being his treatise on bees. With all these personages Beckford was on intimate terms, they valuing his friendship, as no man was more capable of imparting pleasure.

On one of his excursions from Geneva he visited the sage of Ferney. Passing through the village, and observing a small chapel with the inscription over the doorway, *Deo Optimo Maximo*, Beckford asked who preached there, and was told that Voltaire himself sometimes officiated, although the building was usually in the charge of a Jesuit named Père Adam. Of this man Voltaire wittily said, "Quoiqu'il fût le Père Adam, il n'était pas le premier des hommes." The visitors were received by Voltaire's niece, Madame Denis, who announced them to the philosopher. He soon entered, politely saluting each in turn. He stooped very much, and was very dark and shrivelled, while his eyes, at eighty-four, retained all their wonted fire. He spoke to Beckford of his father, and, addressing the company, said, "You see, gentlemen, a poor octogenarian about to quit the world." After other remarks, he concluded, in English fashion, "My lords and gentlemen, many thanks for your visit. Pray take some refreshment; and then, if it will amuse you, look into my garden and my situation, and give me leave to retire,"—which he at once did.

Another of Beckford's excursions, made during his residence at Geneva, was to the Grande Chartreuse, at that time one of the most celebrated monasteries of Europe. He has left a graphic and vivid picture of this monkish abode, published nearly sixty years after the date of his visit. His description will well reward perusal. Indeed, of all the multitude of books of travel which have been given to the world, we call to mind but few which have the sparkling grace and the perennial charm of Beckford's. In the grouping and coloring of natural scenery he is altogether unrivalled. The monastery in his time was of vast extent, occupied by more than three hundred Carthusians, the present number being scarce over thirty. The Grande Chartreuse was so called because it was at the head of the religious establishments of that order, and it is placed in a wild, romantic region, among the

recesses of the Dauphiné Mountains. The order was nearly as strict as that of La Trappe, the brethren being allowed to converse together once a week, and on the same day to ramble in the surrounding woods. There were immense ranges of buildings on a high rock overlooking a densely wooded valley ; but the place derives celebrity less from its position and former wealth than from the reputation of St. Bruno, who founded it in 1084, and died there in 1101. Beckford spent several days in its hospitable retreat, and has left an enduring record of his gratitude. We cannot better bear our testimony to the charm of his style, in this and all other episodes of his journeys, than to urge upon those who may see this article the perusal of his *Travels*,* in which they will discover “a new pleasure.”

In December, 1778, Beckford returned home, but remained only a short time in England, his time there being chiefly occupied in seeing the country, and in the spring of 1780 he again with his tutor set out for the Continent. He first visited the Low Countries, for which he expresses no great liking, although he has drawn most graphic pictures of their scenery, public buildings, and works of art. It was from his notes made at this time that he compiled his *Letters*, which were not published until 1834. His passion for music and architecture induced him to linger much about the famous cathedrals, examining their structure with a critical eye, and with rapt soul listening to the solemn organ harmonies reverberating through the mighty piles. The reader is sure to kindle with the enthusiasm of the writer. His fondness for tall towers was doubtless nourished at this period by the aspect of lofty spires, with their lacelike Gothic fretwork. He anathematizes Flemish paintings, with rare exceptions, as well as the tobacco smoke, the stagnant canals, and the oyster-like inhabitants of Holland. Even the more picturesque cities of Germany seemed to have slight charm for him ; but he goes into ecstasies over every fine landscape, or brawling cascade, or secluded dell, and in the scenery of the Rhine he found full delight. But his warm and glowing imagination held far greater sympathy with the historic glory and passionate modern life of Italy.

* Republished by Wiley and Putnam, New York (Library of Choice Reading), 1845.

His descriptions of Venice are enchanting, and have also the merit of true pictures of the sea-built city, while the succession of Doges was still unbroken, and the shadow of the once terrible Inquisition of State still brooded over the scene. He made the tour of Italy, visiting most of its famous cities, Bologna, Sienna, Pisa, Padua, Florence, Naples, and Rome. He makes much mention of Pacchierotti, the angel-singer of his day, with a reputation as wide as Europe, but now scarce named, or even remembered, except by the readers of Madame D'Arblay's Diary, so evanescent is the fame of a vocalist. Beckford returned to England shortly before he became of age.

On attaining his majority, and with it his father's colossal fortune, he found himself master of an income of half a million of dollars a year, beside an accumulated fund of some five millions more. When one considers that in his day, owing to the greater value of capital than now, such sums represented much greater money-power than now, he will not wonder at Beckford's being styled "England's wealthiest son." Even estimating the fall of gold within ten years, we perceive what an immense fortune Beckford inherited; and even now, when wealth has so enormously increased as it has in Europe and America within the last thirty years, there are very few incomes in either country which would at all compare with his. He celebrated the occasion of his release from restraint by magnificent festivities, and soon afterward set out again for the Continent. He no doubt moved in style, for the obsequious author of his Memoirs takes good care to narrate every incident of fashionable life with intense satisfaction, — tells how he danced with Lord North's daughter at a court ball, and "*sported* one of the most elegant *vis-à-vis* ever seen." In the same manner, with the minuteness of Jenkins himself, he relates that his idol departed from England with a suite consisting of an artist, a physician, and a musician, filling three carriages, — a retinue which caused him to be mistaken for the Emperor of Austria, but did him no further good than to double the hotel bills. On his return home, toward the end of the year 1782, it is probable that he composed "*Vathek*," a work which will transmit his memory long after his stone whims have mouldered away and his senseless extravagance

has been forgotten. His biographer, who must drag in everything appertaining to him, gives us from his pen a pretty little story translated from the Arabic, and specimens of silly artificial verses about Cupid and Chloe and Strephon, such as Prior and poets of his time furnished *usque ad nauseam*.

The wondrous tale of Vathek was composed by Beckford, according to his own account, in his twenty-third year. He related this to Mr. Cyrus Redding, during a conversation held with him in 1835, saying: "You will hardly credit how closely I was able to apply myself to study when I was young. I wrote Vathek when I was twenty-two years old. I wrote it at one sitting, and in French. It cost me three days and two nights of hard labor. I never took my clothes off the whole time. This severe application made me very ill." He never translated it, but said that the English version was not unjust to the original. The tale first appeared in print in 1784. He informed Mr. Redding that for some of the characters he made studies from personages about Fonthill, exaggerating their mental and animal defects, and that he drew his description of the Hall of Eblis, one of the most striking portions of the work, from the great hall in his father's house, one of the largest rooms in the kingdom, very lofty and loud-echoing, while numerous doors opened from it into long, dim, and winding passages. It is not easy to discover the exact sources whence Mr. Beckford derived his supernatural machinery, as his demons, gnomes, and sprites differ from those of Arabian imagery, and partake in some degree of those of India. The work appears to have been at once appreciated, stamped as it is with original and brilliant power, and none have ever been more impressed with it than Lord Byron, a most fastidious critic, by no means profuse in his praises, and singularly unerring in judgment. "Vathek," he says, "for correctness of costume, beauty of description, and power of imagination, far surpasses all European imitations. As an Eastern tale, even Rasselas must bow before it; his happy valley will not bear a comparison with the Hall of Eblis."

The plot of the tale is as follows. Vathek, one of the Ab-basside Caliphs, and grandson of Haroun al Raschid, finding life a burden, although he is surrounded by pleasures of

every description which minister to every sense, aspires to higher knowledge than that vouchsafed to mankind. Aided by his mother, Carathis, a desperate, remorseless human fiend, he invokes the assistance of infernal agents. In his quest he is too successful, and after committing numberless and frightful crimes at the instigation of a horrible demon, or Giaour, who promises him eternal power in the realm of Eblis, and capping his atrocities by the seduction of Nou-ronihar, daughter of a subject emir whose hospitality he thus abuses, he and his wretched victim find themselves indeed introduced into the Hall of Eblis, but at the same instant learn their doom of eternal agony. Carathis also joins the infernal company, and all wander together in the abyss of desolation. The whole tale is one of the wildest extravagance. The most grotesque and hideous imagination animates its scenes. Its magic incantations and stupendous horrors have no parallel in the Arabian Nights, nor indeed in the whole compass of fiction. Space will permit us only to quote from the latter portion of the work, descriptive of the infernal splendors amidst which sat throned Eblis, the archfiend of Mohammedan theology.

Arrived at the fatal portal with his companion, over it he found characters inscribed, clearly visible in the bright moonlight, but changing their shape every instant.

“These, after vacillating for some time, fixed at last in Arabic letters, and prescribed to the Caliph the following words: ‘Vathek! thou hast violated the conditions of my parchment, and deservest to be sent back; but in favor to thy companion, and as the meed for what thou hast done to obtain it, Eblis permitteth that the portal of his palace shall be opened, and the subterranean fire will receive thee into the number of its adorers.’

“He scarcely had read these words, before the mountain, against which the terrace was reared, trembled, and the watch-towers were ready to topple headlong upon them. The rock yawned, and disclosed within it a staircase of polished marble, that seemed to approach the abyss.

“This appearance, instead of terrifying, gave new courage to the daughter of Fakreddin. Scarcely deigning to bid adieu to the moon and the firmament, she abandoned without hesitation the pure atmosphere, to plunge into these infernal exhalations. The gait of those

impious personages was haughty and determined. As they descended, by the effulgence of the torches, they gazed on each other with mutual admiration, and both appeared so resplendent, that they already esteemed themselves spiritual intelligences. . . . Their progress, however, was at length impeded by a vast portal of ebony, which the Caliph without difficulty recognized. Here the Giaour awaited them, with the key in his hand. 'Ye are welcome!' said he to them, with a ghastly smile, 'in spite of Mahomet, and all his dependents. I will now admit you into that palace where you have so highly merited a place.' Whilst he was uttering these words, he touched the enamelled lock with his key, and the doors at once expanded with a noise still louder than the thunder of the dog-days, and as suddenly recoiled the moment they had entered.

"The Caliph and Nouronihar beheld each other with amazement, at finding themselves in a place which, though roofed with a vaulted ceiling, was so spacious and lofty, that at first they took it for an immeasurable plain. But their eyes at length growing familiar to the grandeur of the surrounding objects, they extended their view to those at a distance, and discovered rows of columns and arcades, which gradually diminished, till they terminated in a point, radiant as the sun, when he darts his last beams athwart the ocean. The pavement, strewn over with gold-dust and saffron, exhaled so subtile an odor as almost overpowered them. They however went on and observed an infinity of censers, in which ambergris and the wood of aloes were continually burning. Between the several columns were placed tables, each spread with a profusion of viands, and wines of every species, sparkling in vases of crystal. A throng of Genii, and other fantastic spirits of either sex, danced lasciviously, at the sound of music which issued from beneath.

"In the midst of this immense hall, a vast multitude was incessantly passing, who severally kept their right hands on their hearts, without once regarding anything around them. They had all the livid paleness of death. Their eyes deep sunk in their sockets resembled those phosphoric meteors that glimmer by night in places of interment. Some stalked slowly on, absorbed in profound reverie; some, shrieking with agony, ran furiously about like tigers wounded with poisoned arrows; whilst others, grinding their teeth in rage, foamed along, more frantic than the wildest maniac. They all avoided each other, and, though surrounded by a multitude that no one could number, each wandered at random unheeding of the rest, as if alone on a desert which no foot had trodden.

"Vathek and Nouronihar, frozen with terror at a sight so baleful,

demand of the Giaour what these appearances might mean, and why these ambulating spectres never withdrew their hands from their hearts. ‘Perplex not yourselves with so much at once,’ replied he, bluntly, ‘you will soon be acquainted with all; let us haste and present you to Eblis.’”

The demon led them through long “perspectives of halls and of galleries, that opened on the right hand and left, which were all illuminated by torches and braziers whose flames rose in pyramids to the centre of the vault.” At length they were tremblingly ushered into the immediate presence of the fiend, sitting upon a globe of fire which topped a lofty eminence. “His person was that of a young man, whose noble and regular features seemed to have been tarnished by malignant vapors. In his large eyes appeared both pride and despair; his flowing hair retained some resemblance to that of an angel of light.” He addresses the “creatures of clay” before him, welcomes them to his kingdom, and bids them enjoy all. They eagerly turn to the Giaour, and demand his aid in their introduction to exhaustless riches and joy.

“‘Come,’ answered this wicked Dive, with his malignant grin, — ‘come and possess all that my sovereign hath promised, and more.’ He then conducted them into a long aisle adjoining the tabernacle, preceding them with hasty steps, and followed by his disciples with the utmost alacrity. They reached at length a hall of great extent, and covered with a lofty dome, around which appeared fifty portals of bronze, secured with as many fastenings of iron. A funereal gloom prevailed over the whole scene. Here, upon two beds of incorruptible cedar, lay recumbent the fleshless forms of the Pre-Adamite kings, who had been monarchs of the whole earth. They still possessed enough of life to be conscious of their deplorable condition. Their eyes retained a melancholy motion; they regarded one another with looks of the deepest dejection, each holding his right hand motionless on his heart. At their feet were inscribed the events of their several reigns, — their power, their pride, and their crimes. . . . All these maintained great state, though not to be compared with the eminence of Soliman Ben Daoud.

“This king, so renowned for his wisdom, was on the loftiest elevation, and placed immediately under the dome. He appeared to possess more animation than the rest. Though from time to time he

labored with profound sighs, and like his companions kept his right hand on his heart, yet his countenance was more composed, and he seemed to be listening to the sullen roar of a vast cataract, visible in part through the grated portals. This was the only sound that intruded on the silence of these doleful mansions."

He too addresses the Caliph and his mistress, informing them that for his crimes and idolatry he was condemned to anguish, but that, in consideration of his early piety, his punishment was not eternal, like that of the others; that when the cataract should cease to flow he would be released, but until then a burning fire would prey upon his heart.

"Having uttered this exclamation, Soliman raised his hands toward heaven, in token of supplication, and the Caliph discerned through his bosom, which was transparent as crystal, his heart enveloped in flames. At a sight so full of horror, Nouronihar fell back like one petrified into the arms of Vathek, who cried out with a convulsive sob, 'O Giaour! whither hast thou brought us! Allow us to depart, and I will relinquish all thou hast promised. O Mahomet! remains there no more mercy!' 'None! none!' replied the malicious Dive. 'Know, miserable prince, thou art now in the abode of vengeance and despair. Thy heart also will be kindled like those of the other votaries of Eblis. A few days are allotted thee previous to this fatal period: employ them as thou wilt; recline on these heaps of gold; command the infernal potentates; range at thy pleasure through these immense subterranean domains: no barrier shall be shut against thee. As for me, I have fulfilled my mission. I now leave thee to thyself.'"

At the words, the demon vanishes, and the dupes of wicked ambition wake to a full sense of their wretched lot, and wander about hand in hand, unheeding of the majestic scenes and unimagined riches opening on every hand, — of the Dives falling prostrate before them, and of the portals opening untouched at their approach. At length they meet with several other personages like themselves waiting doom, and all agree to relate the story of their crimes. While thus engaged, they are startled by a clap of thunder, and Carathis enters the vault on the back of an Afrit. She, utterly undismayed either by the terrors of the scene or the curses which Vathek heaps upon her,

"eagerly entered the dome of Soliman, and, without regarding in

the least the groans of the prophet, undauntedly removed the covers of the vases, and violently seized on the talismans. Then, with a voice more loud than had hitherto been heard in these mansions, she compelled the Dives to disclose to her the most secret treasures, the most profound stores, which the Afrit himself had not seen. She passed by rapid descents known only to Eblis and his most favored potentates, and thus penetrated the very entrails of the earth, where breathes the Sansar, or icy wind of death. Nothing appalled her dauntless soul. She perceived, however, in all the inmates who bore their hands on their heart a little singularity not much to her taste.

"As she was emerging from one of the abysses, Eblis stood forth to her view; but notwithstanding he displayed the full effulgence of his infernal majesty, she preserved her countenance unaltered, and even paid her compliments with considerable firmness.

"This superb monarch thus answered: 'Princess, whose knowledge and whose crimes have merited a conspicuous rank in my empire, thou doest well to avail yourself of the leisure that remains, for the flames and torments which are ready to seize on thy heart will not fail to provide thee with full employment.'

Carathis is startled for a moment, but, recovering, she calls on all the demons of the abyss to do her reverence, and even attempts to usurp the place of one of the Solimans, when a voice proclaims, "All is accomplished."

"Instantaneously the haughty forehead of the intrepid princess became corrugated with agony; she uttered a tremendous yell, and fixed no more to be withdrawn her right hand upon her heart, which was become a receptacle of eternal fire.

"In this delirium, forgetting all ambitious projects, and her thirst for that knowledge which should ever be hidden from mortals, she overturned the offerings of the Genii; and having execrated the hour she was begotten, and the womb that had borne her, glanced off in a whirl that rendered her invisible, and continued to revolve without intermission.

"Almost at the same instant, the same voice announced to the Caliph, Nouronihar, the four princes, and the princess, the awful and irrevocable decree. Their hearts immediately took fire, and they at once lost the most precious gift of heaven,—Hope. These unhappy beings recoiled with looks of the most furious distraction. . . . All testified their horror for each other by the most ghastly convulsions, and screams that could not be smothered. All severally plunged themselves into the accursed multitude, there to wander in an eternity of unabated anguish."

These extracts will sufficiently denote the style and tone of the book. Portions of it are repulsive and disgusting, and it can never be from its peculiarities a strictly popular work; but its wondrous invention and splendor of language will effectually preserve it from oblivion.

On the 5th of May, 1783, Beckford married Lady Margaret Gordon, daughter of the Earl of Aboyne. With his wife he took up his residence in Switzerland. She lived but about three years after her marriage, and died on the 26th of May, 1786, after giving birth to a second daughter, who subsequently married the Duke of Hamilton. Beckford appears to have been fondly attached to her, and never married again. He returned to England, remained there but a short time, and then set out on his first journey to Spain and Portugal. For full details of this, and of his second visit, we must again refer the reader to his published volumes, whose charms should not be marred by extracts. It is sufficient to observe that he saw Spain and Portugal, as he had seen Venice and other Italian cities, under the old *régime*, before the French Revolution swept down so many feudal barriers with its resistless waves, when the divine right of kings was yet unquestioned, and priestcraft ruled the state with iron will. Beckford took with him a large suite, and his wealth and position enabled him to mingle with the very highest society, with the most powerful nobles and ecclesiastics, and even with royalty itself. With the Marialva family in Lisbon he was on terms of great intimacy, and through their aid he was enabled to see much usually denied to strangers. Never on earth did the monkish order enjoy more than in the Portugal of old time, and Mr. Beckford narrates with lively gratification scenes of their good cheer in splendid monasteries, furnished ever with the fat of the land, where they had no cause to envy even the monks of Melrose, who

“ Made good kale
On Fridays when they fasted ;
Nor wanted they for beef and ale
As long as their neighbors’ lasted.”

Of course superstition and ignorance went hand in hand. Going out to dine one day, he found the heir of the family

learning to look out of the window, such being the chief employment of high life in Portugal. At the dinner he was entertained by stories of a most marvellous order from a young priest, who, among other things, told how a nun had intrigued with Beelzebub. The demon had climbed in through a window, but it had been fastened up and painted over with crosses, so that he was effectually shut out for the future. What must have been the state of society when tales like this were implicitly credited in the highest circles? It is not at all singular that, when the whole mind of the nation was swayed by the priesthood, magnificent convents and monasteries should have abounded. The royal palaces even — that of Mafra, like the Escorial in Spain, after which it was planned — appeared built rather for priests than for princes. Beckford visited it, and describes his first distant glimpse of it, rising with its lofty dome and towers over the landscape, and a vast expanse of the blue sea beyond. The eminences around were planted with cypresses and Italian pines, and rocks and trees concealed a nearer view of the edifice on approach, until, on turning an angle of the garden, the mighty pile burst on the sight, the grand front being eight hundred feet long. The centre was broken by the porticos of the church, and towers two hundred feet high, of light, graceful architecture, relieved the extreme length. Within, the visitor found an imposing temple incrustated with the rarest marbles and sculptures, made solemn by the most impressive religious services, with six great organs to enrich the pomp of full ceremonial. Throughout the building were enormous vaulted halls of alabaster and porphyry, carpeted and gorgeously furnished. A library, three hundred feet long, stuccoed and paved with marble, contained sixty thousand volumes, many of them the rarest editions of the classics. A dormitory, six hundred feet long, was supplied with three hundred cells, each well lighted and furnished. As for the part appropriated to the palace, the stranger saw vast suites of apartments and staircases, but all empty and deserted. The monk had driven out the king.

Thus was it also in his visit to the Escorial while at Madrid. He had letters to the Prior, which were to open at one view

all the recesses of that “wilderness of building,”—perhaps the most remarkable monument of kingly power and bigotry ever reared by man,—planned, superintended, and finished by Philip II., who lavished upon it untold wealth, and left it in charge to his successors to adorn yet further. Mr. Beckford saw it when it was still peerless ; for until 1808, when it was sacked by the French, it remained the richest palace in the world, most precious, even if in nothing else, in its masterpieces of Titian. But it never could have been a cheerful residence. Its architecture is sombre, its situation harsh and sterile, while the stern spirit of its founder ever brooded over it. Uniting in one pile church, palace, monastery, and tomb,—all its characteristics seemed to be merged in the last, and it ever impressed the stranger with the solemn dread of the mausoleum. The building was shown to Beckford by a monk of stern, forbidding presence ; and he describes, with great effect, the church and convent ; the sepulchral chamber of the Spanish sovereigns, with the sound of running water through passages in its walls falling with chill terror on the ear ; the endless corridors, staircases, and apartments ; the cabinets enriched with the rarest pictures ; the collection of sacred relics, hideous bones and skulls sparkling with gems, and, holiest of all, a feather three feet in length, shed from the wing of the Archangel Gabriel,—to be contemplated kneeling and in perfect silence.

Again, during his second Portuguese visit, which we anticipate, he visited the celebrated monastic establishments of Alcobaca and Batalha,—the former the seat of the most luxurious life,—both now, we imagine, remembered only in Beckford’s pages ; for the storm which followed the French Revolution burst upon them as on the Escorial, and the regions which they dignified were changed to deserts by the contending legions of Wellington and Massena. But when Beckford saw Alcobaca, it maintained a spiritual army of four hundred monks. How they fared we learn from him after he had inspected the monastery, and proceeded to its kitchen. Through the centre of a vast hall sixty feet in diameter ran a rivulet of clear, fresh water, containing swimming fish of the finest kinds. Game and venison were heaped about, as profusely as

in Landseer's picture of Bolton Abbey, and ovens and saucepans alternated with fruits and vegetables. A crowd of lay brothers were rolling out pastry, and singing merrily. The guests were splendidly entertained, in apartments containing fine pictures, and lighted by a profusion of wax candles in silver sconces. In these rooms the basins and ewers were of the same rich metal. When Batalha was visited in company with some of the monks, wines and provisions in abundance were despatched in advance, as that monastery was poor; but Beckford appears to have been much better pleased on this and subsequent visits with the devout bearing of the inmates, and the fine, solemn music, than with the prodigality and gluttony of Alcobaça. He visited Portugal for a third time some years later, and during a stay in Paris, between his excursions, he witnessed the capture of the Bastile, and he was also there when Louis XVI. was executed. While in the French capital, he was much interested in magical experiments.

Beckford returned from his second Peninsular visit in 1796, at the age of thirty-six years. Sixteen years of his life had passed in almost constant residence abroad, and he now determined to stay at home. His foreign experience had confirmed his taste for splendor, and his immense wealth pampered his intense selfishness. His father's house at Fonthill was one of the finest of its day in the kingdom; but it did not satisfy the son, and he resolved that his new creation should have no rival. The old house did not interfere with the new, being on a different site; but no thought of disposing of it seems to have entered his mind, and, princely as it was, he proceeded to demolish it,—first the wings, of two stories, and then the centre, of four. Thus what had cost more than half a million of dollars was recklessly destroyed for a mere whim. Beckford maintained a large household, and a physician, a musical performer, and the Abbé Maquin, topographer, artist, literary character, and adept in heraldry, were permanently attached to his establishment. One of his first operations was to build a wall around his domain, seven miles in extent, and twelve feet high. He said that it was to keep off trespassers on his game; but it had the effect of keeping the general public at a

distance, which no doubt was nearer his desire. When he pulled down the old house, he proceeded to alter the grounds about it. There was an artificial lake near it, its banks ornamented with rocks, caverns, and grottos. This was all changed, and in due time sheep ran wild where the mansion had stood. No amount of money was spared to gratify any extravagance. Beckford would still have maintained the bulk of his fortune unimpaired, in spite of losses in Jamaica, had he not so senselessly broken in upon his capital. Hundreds of workmen were employed day and night upon the Abbey, as it was styled; and it is said that laborers were induced by larger pay to desert the royal works at Windsor, although the fact is not stated in these Memoirs. If true, it was probably on the occasion of Lord Nelson's visit in 1800, when, in order to complete a certain part of the pile, he set five hundred men at work, a portion of them laboring at night by torch-light. He had known Sir William Hamilton and his first wife intimately in Naples; and now that his second wife had become so scandalously connected with Nelson, she and her husband were included as guests at his splendid fête. Old Font-hill was still in existence, and the visitors with a brilliant company were entertained there for three days in such style as excited their wonder. The crowning glory of the entertainment was reserved for a night scene, when the Abbey, as far as it was completed, was fitted up in monastic style, and a fête was held in it such as might have been seen in Sicily, the buildings and plantations being illuminated by myriads of lamps, torches, and fires.

About six months after this time the Abbey was so far advanced that its master decided to occupy it, and accordingly he left his father's mansion, sold off its magnificent effects, and proceeded soon afterward to demolish it. Although this place never excited a tithe of the curiosity which the Abbey did afterward, it attracted vast numbers at the sale, and people wondered equally at the wealth and the folly of one who could deliberately destroy what had cost such vast sums, and in point of true taste probably far excelled its successor. The building was not only a palace in size and appointments, but the grounds were of the highest elegance, planted with every

American, European, and Asiatic tree and shrub that could be procured, and enlivened with sheets of water, the haunt of aquatic birds. All was sacrificed to the whim of "Vathek." We should perhaps hardly prolong this article by an account of the Abbey, but for the fact that it avenged the Vandalism that attended its erection by crippling the owner, and that its celebrity is now only historic; for after passing from Beckford to Mr. Farquhar, a wealthy miser, in whose hands the great central tower, its distinctive feature, fell, it passed again out of aristocratic keeping to Mr. Morison, a tradesman, who died in 1858, leaving twenty millions of dollars, thus ending about where Beckford began. There was no story, however extravagant, that was not believed of the famous Abbey when building. A writer in one of the leading London papers said that the ascent of the central tower would be so wide and easy, that a coach and six could be driven to the top and down again without difficulty. The gaping public were content to swallow these marvellous figments; for they could obtain no sight of the pile.

The building was in the form of a cross, the arms of which were nearly of the same length, although differing in breadth. The exterior measurement was two hundred and seventy feet from east to west, and from north to south three hundred and twelve. In the axis of the cross rose the central octagon tower, to the vast height of two hundred and seventy-six feet. The interior was divided into numberless halls, staircases, galleries, saloons, libraries, oratories, drawing-rooms, and cabinets. Everything like convenience was sacrificed to grand effect, to long perspective aisles and arches. One octagonal room, formed by the great tower, was thirty-five feet only in diameter, and one hundred and twenty-eight feet high. In the huge fabric there were but seventeen bedrooms, thirteen of which were at a most distressing height; and the whole far better merited the satire of Pope on Blenheim, than the sumptuous palace of Marlborough:—

"'Tis very fine;

But where d'ye sleep, or where d'ye dine?

I find, by all you have been telling,

That 't is a house, but not a dwelling."

Part of the interior of the eastern wing was never finished, but all the rest was completed. The most splendid effect was secured, not only by architecture of gigantic proportion, but also by vast mirrors multiplying aisles and galleries, by a profusion of stained glass and heraldic decorations, by the richest velvet draperies and hangings of various colors, and by a collection of furniture, pictures, books, antiques, Greek, Roman, and Etruscan, and dazzling articles of *virtu* of Cellini's time, in apparently exhaustless profusion. A mere catalogue of these costly toys would bewilder the reader. The amount spent upon them was almost fabulous, and when they were dispersed in 1823, their sale under the hammer occupied forty-one days. Beckford stated that the Abbey alone cost him nearly a million and a half of dollars. Its interior decoration must have cost twice as much, without estimating anything for the grounds, while we know that millions of dollars were spent upon the plantations. In his impatience, which could brook no delay, parts of the Abbey were so ill constructed that the work was necessarily renewed.* Thus his great tower was three times rebuilt, and fell at last. It is said that he was swindled enormously by builders and agents, as any man with sublime contempt for economy is likely to be.

In his palace of pleasures Beckford lived for more than twenty years, sixteen of which were passed in almost entire seclusion. He entertained nobody, had very few friends or visitors, and in great part made associates of his topographer, musician, and others of his household. Still, these were mere subordinates, and even his own daughters do not seem to have passed much time with him.† Something out of the common course of events must have contributed to his withdrawal from the world, and we have heard of circumstances not even alluded to in these Memoirs to account for it. Beckford had

* Once the tower fell from the effect of a large flag hoisted on the top of it, which exerted in a high wind such leverage as to topple it over. When informed of the mishap, Beckford, merely regretting that he had not seen it fall, gave an immediate order for the construction of another.

† The Duchess of Gordon, hoping to catch him for one of her daughters, once paid him a visit. She was splendidly entertained for a week, but her host never once allowed her to see him, and she finally left Fonthill in a rage.

an ugly dwarf as servant, and the story goes that he was accused of improper practices with him. He prosecuted an editor who mentioned it for libel, and recovered damages. It was doubtless foul slander; but such an accusation might naturally tell powerfully against one so shy and haughty as he, and from his command of money and mental resources little dependent on society. His biographer only says that he survived the vilest detraction, referring doubtless to this calumny. Recluse as he was, Beckford was neither idle nor unhappy. His knowledge of French, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, and Persian secured to him the literary charms of those languages; he was an omnivorous reader and book-collector, and a thorough musician; his taste for art was elaborately cultivated, while his passionate love of nature and acquaintance with botany afforded him constant recreation abroad. The magnificent gardens and groves covered nearly two thousand acres within the wall, while beyond it were three thousand more. When he gave an order or wished an alteration made, it was obeyed as if by Vathek's magic power. At night scores of laborers were set to work, those of the adjacent village being sometimes wanted, and by the next morning, when the Caliph walked out, the transformation was complete. Although he lived for himself, his expenses were immense; and in 1822, when he decided to sell Fonthill, he stated that he could not live there for less than thirty thousand pounds a year.

By that time his colossal fortune had become seriously impaired. His palace, reared upon a barren mountain, which by plantations became a paradise, cost, as we have seen, prodigious sums; the managers of his West Indian property doubtless cheated him; the estates themselves, in view of emancipation, declined in value, while some were totally lost in lawsuits. Even as far back as 1801, one of the Jamaica estates which had been sixty years in the family, and had produced twelve thousand pounds per annum, was taken from him for want of title by a decree of chancery, and, as chancery proceedings in those days were proverbially costly, he sunk thousands more in defending his claim. From one cause or another, the principal one his unbridled extrava-

gance, he found in 1823, when sixty-four years of age, that his five million dollars of ready money had disappeared, beside which his regular annual income of five hundred thousand more was reduced to a mere fraction of what it had been. His biographer sees with a snob's eye imposing grandeur in such waste, and whines over the downfall as he would over that of a kingdom. In the whole record of prodigality we can scarce call to mind a parallel to Beckford's folly. He hesitated for some time whether to live in a small place on his estate, and keep his huge pile to look at, since he could not live in it, or to part with it altogether. He wisely decided to sell it, disposed of the whole estate to Mr. Farquhar for a large sum, removed the choicest of his paintings, books, porcelain, and *virtu* to Bath, and then the sale of his rarities commenced. The disposal of them attracted greater attention among the fashionables of the kingdom than any event of the century. The sale occupied more than six weeks, during which time every house within many miles of the Abbey reaped a golden harvest by letting rooms, while thousands were eager to possess some relic of the place, and thousands more to see a palace from which they had been rigidly excluded. Then all were dazzled by the sight of its riches within and without; but for one who appreciated its real beauties of groves and gardens, hundreds were tickled by the display of tapestries, stained glass, ebony cabinets, caskets, Eastern vases, marble tables, coffers, robe chests, clocks, candelabra, jewelled ornaments, onyx cups, lapis-lazuli and gold boxes, miniatures, ivory furniture, and unnumbered articles of luxury. Then many stories of his magnificence, taste, and prodigality were repeated, some true, and many more without foundation. His worshipper tells us that his table was generally plain, and we may believe that he could now and then dine simply, without insisting on "venison cutlets, each served up in a hundred pound note, with sovereign sauce."

On his removal to Bath, he at once established himself in splendid style, and began the formation of another collection as far as his means would allow. He planted a lofty hill adjoining his house with trees and shrubs, laid out walks

and gardens, and on the top of it built another tower one hundred and twenty feet high. He made, in short, upon the hill and his residence below, a smaller Fonthill Abbey, and there in the same seclusion passed the last twenty years of his life without incident. We will spare the reader any further details of brick and mortar, Sevres china and *virtu*. He died on the 2d of May, 1844, aged eighty-four years and seven months, and lies buried near his tower, the hill-grounds having been given for a public cemetery by his daughter, the Duchess of Hamilton. On his tomb is inscribed a sentence from "Vathek," and a quotation from some beautiful lines of his, entitled "A Prayer": —

"Eternal Power!

Grant me, through obvious clouds, one transient gleam
Of thy bright essence in my dying hour."

Of Beckford's genius we have spoken already, and endeavored to do it justice. In his private character we find little to admire, and many others like ourselves will feel tempted to ask of one singularly gifted in mind and fortune, "What is all this worth?" Nearly all the property he held at his death passed to his daughter, the Duchess of Hamilton, whose elder sister married to displease him, lived poor, and died unforgiven. It is said that he was charitable, and gave money freely to the needy; but during his whole life we do not learn that he was for a moment interested in any philanthropic purpose, or bestowed a shilling for one. He lived in utter selfishness, and had no sympathy with his fellow-men. For his wonderful romance we have high admiration, and his travels are charming. These are the sole fruits of his life, which in other respects we regard as wasted; his pursuits having been of far less value than those of another noted literary character, Anastasius Hope, when he "meditated on muffineers and planned pokers."